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Driven West: Andrew Jackson and the Trail of Tears to the Civil War

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Review

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Langguth, A. J. *Driven West: Andrew Jackson and the Trail of Tears to the Civil War*. Simon & Schuster, \$30.00 ISBN 978-1-4165-4859-1

Another Look at Cherokee Removal

A.J. Langguth's latest offering, *Driven West: Andrew Jackson and the Trail of Tears to the Civil War*, is an imaginative retelling of a familiar tale. Told as a series of miniature biographies that drive the narrative, Langguth begins with Henry Clay's efforts to win the presidency in 1824, and ends with Stand Watie's insistence that the Cherokee in Oklahoma fight for the Confederacy. Along the way, Langguth dexterously weaves together the complexities of Removal without minimizing the tragic nature of the event. Langguth shows how the tangle of party politics, land, and later gold fever and racism led politicians to implement Removal.

Langguth's narrative is filled with the typical story of the Jacksonian presidency: the corrupt bargain that propelled Jackson to the presidency in 1828, the Eaton Affair, Nullification, and the Bank War. Langguth rightly places Removal as one of the defining aspects of Jackson's presidency. Where Langguth succeeds, though, is in his focus on the situation in Georgia, and particularly the various political factions within the state that more or less agreed on the need for Removal. Most accounts of Removal focus solely on Jackson's efforts at passing legislation that would empower his policy, or on the drastic affects Removal had on Cherokee society. Aside from the gold rush, few historians have placed such a heavy emphasis on state politics when describing the build-up to Removal.

Where Langguth falls short, however, and where other reviewers have been harsh on *Driven West*, is his insistence on proclaiming Cherokee Removal, "The first civil war," that had "pitted North against South and ended in defeat for the North" (396). Such an argument stretched a compelling and dramatic book

beyond its confines. For a civil war there was a surprising dearth of bloodshed and violence. Though Langguth qualifies his claim by saying the clash only took place in the halls of Congress, it led to the bloodier conflict three decades later.

How much of a dispute between North and South could Removal have been, after all, if residents of Cornwall, Connecticut—the location of the Foreign Mission School that educated several Cherokee youths—burned in effigy Harriet Gold and Elias Boudinot upon learning of their engagement? At stake for most white citizens with Indian Removal was the continuation of their primacy in American life, not the power of the central government. In other words, what whites feared most was miscegenation, and not an attack on their liberties. When Georgia laid claim to Cherokee land, asserted sovereignty over it, and began to survey the land to raffle off, northerners may have found its actions brash. But by and large, most did not believe that Natives could or should assimilate into white society through acculturation policy or intermarriage, and looked the other way as whites moved in to the Cherokee Nation.

By allowing Georgia to eschew federal statutes, secessionists in later years, according to Langguth, could once again assert their authority over federal law by leaving the Union. In 1860, though, they misjudged the temper of their northern neighbors who saw little harm in allowing a southern state to ride roughshod over Indians, but did have major grievances when those same states put the Union in jeopardy. At stake in the 1830s was the supremacy of whites in American life and law, something that few questioned. Three decades later, northerners would not sit idly by while southern firebrands broke apart the Union of the Founders.

That does not mean, though, that a type of civil war did not erupt in Georgia. In 1829, when thousands of “twenty-niners” flocked to Cherokee land in search of gold, whites with permanent ties in the counties bordering the Cherokee Nation sought to control the seemingly lawless hordes that had descended upon them. One group, calling itself the Regulators, teamed up with Cherokee men and women to cooperate in bringing order to the unsettled lands between white and Cherokee settlements. That cooperation did not last long, as the whites that had once aided their Cherokee neighbors joined militia companies to aid the government in expelling Natives from the state.

Langguth’s narrative might swerve a little too often down avenues that seemingly have little to do with Removal, but by doing so he is able to capture

the intricacies of politics, especially at a time when it was dominated by so many forceful personalities, and the startling amount of interconnectedness that Removal shared with the national road and other issues of the time. Aside from a few factual errors (Henry Clay's plantation Ashland shows up in Tennessee at one point (394)), and his insistence on calling Native women "squaws," Langguth's *Driven West* is a highly readable account of an important American story.

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